



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

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**ONE OF BARRINGTON'S FIRST PLANNED SUBURBAN DEVELOPMENTS:
ALFRED DROWNE RD HISTORIC DISTRICT LISTED ON NATIONAL REGISTER**

A well-preserved example of a residential suburb in West Barrington has received federal recognition for its contributions to the history of architecture and community planning. Frederick C. Williamson, Chairman of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission (RIHPHC), announced that the National Park Service has added the Alfred Drowne Road Historic District to the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is the Federal Government's official list of properties throughout the United States whose historical and architectural significance makes them worthy of preservation. The Alfred Drowne Road Historic District exemplifies Barrington's transformation from an agricultural community to a highly desirable suburb of Providence. The district includes excellent examples of residential architectural styles from the 1830s to the 1940s.

The Alfred Drowne Road Historic District contains 43 private residences in an approximately 27-acre area in West Barrington. All of the buildings have frontage on Alfred Drowne Road, with the exception of three buildings on Washington Road. From the colonial era into the mid-1850s most of West Barrington was farmland. The Drown (sometimes spelled Drowne) family acquired land in the area by the early 1800s. In 1833, Alfred Drown (1797-1890)

purchased property that included an 18th-century house, which had likely been moved from another location. His house at 13 Alfred Drowne Road is the oldest surviving building in the district.

When the railroad arrived in Barrington in 1855, Alfred Drown recognized the potential for profits. He sold land to the Providence, Warren and Bristol Railroad in 1856 for the construction of a depot and served as the station agent. Drown family members erected a cluster of homes, including the Greek Revival-style Samuel Drown House at 209 Washington Road (1863) and the Italianate-style Charles E. Drown House at 219 Washington Road (1868). A few lots were sold to families like the Chapins who built an Italianate-style house at 26 Alfred Drowne Road in 1858.

Developer Henry Staples acquired much of the Drown farmland to subdivide into residential building lots. The 1868 Staples plat, which established the street grid from First to Sixth Street on the east side of Alfred Drowne Road, is one of the earliest residential plats in Barrington. Several houses in the district were built on the Staples plat, all around 1870. Development in the area continued gradually, with four additional houses being built by 1890, bringing the total up to 16. Some residents, like Reuben Hunt at 96 Alfred Drown Road, partner in an oyster company, pursued local work tied to the bay. Others, including members of the Lewis family, commuted to jobs at Providence jewelry factories.

A new wave of subdivision and construction followed Alfred Drown's death in 1890. The George Howard and Olive Smith House (1894), constructed at the corner of Alfred Drowne Road and Washington Road, is significant as the earliest of the dozen Colonial Revival-style residences in the district. Designed by female architect May Mason, the residence features a hip roof with balustrade; pedimented dormers; wraparound porch with paired columns; and a porte-cochere. Other early 20th-century houses display the Queen Anne style and the Craftsman style, the latter of which became popular in the 1910s and 1920s. The Craftsman-style residence at 46A Alfred Drowne Road (by 1921) is a converted automobile garage.

By 1921, 35 houses were in place. Residents of the new homes included businessmen in the jewelry and textile industries, doctors, and clerks, many of whom commuted to Providence. In 1938, the hurricane damaged the railroad tracks, and train service was canceled. By that time many Drownville locals commuted by automobile. Many residences constructed in the 1910s and 1920s included a garage, and older homes added garages to their lots or converted existing barns.

By the mid-20th century, the district looked much as it does today. Changes—additions, demolitions, and infill—have been minimal since the 1940s. The influence of the railroad on the neighborhood is apparent in its moderately sized lots, relatively dense development, and through the presence of the East Bay Bike Path, constructed in the late 1980s on the former track bed. The neighborhood's concentrated period of development, with most houses constructed between 1870 and 1910, resulted in a very coherent streetscape. The district's visual characteristics and history speak to the transformation of Barrington from an agricultural community to a thriving suburb.

The National Register nomination for the Alfred Drowne Road District was prepared by preservation consultant Joanna Doherty for the Barrington Preservation Society. According to Edward F. Sanderson, executive director of the RIHPHC, "The settlement of Drownville 150 years ago is an early chapter in the history of Rhode Island's suburbs. The group of attractive and well-kept homes in the district deserve recognition as an important part of historic Barrington."

In addition to honoring a property for its contribution to local, state, or national history, listing on the National Register provides additional benefits. It results in special consideration during the planning of Federal or federally assisted projects and makes properties eligible for Federal and Rhode Island tax benefits for historic rehabilitation projects. Owners of private property listed on the National Register are free to maintain, manage, or dispose of their property as they choose. As the state office for historic preservation, the Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission is responsible for reviewing and submitting Rhode Island nominations to the National Register.

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